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ABSTRACT

This paper uses the Organized Universe as a framework for describing a successful four-year program to improve the school climate at a junior high school in Houston. The program began in the Summer of 1978 and was part of a larger Teacher Corps project that included four urban inner city schools. The organizers of the project used a management approach to build school climate. Three vehicles for facilitating change were employed by the Management Team: off-campus graduate courses for teachers, school retreats, and school/classroom management programs. A total of 11 significant positive changes from 1980-81 and 1981-82 were recorded when compared to the 1979-80 data. This project is seen as illustrating both a facilitative approach toward school climate and a variety of opportunities to involve faculty and administration in the process. (RDN)

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A CASE STUDY OF SCHOOL CLIMATE IMPROVEMENT AT AN URBAN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

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Introduction

The climate of a school may be compared to the air we breathe — we ignore it until it becomes noticeably offensive. The concern for the climate or atmosphere of the school and its resulting effect on the student was a concern to educators at the turn of the century. Arthur Perry (1908) in a text for school administrators underlined the importance of the school surroundings:

> Although it is quite impossible to reduce to any mathematical ratio the extent to which pupils are affected by the quality of their material environment, nevertheless, it must be admitted that they are distinctly influenced by their surroundings, and that it becomes a duty of the school to provide something more than mere "housing." (p.)

Perry continued his discussion of the school environment with what he felt was "One of the most potent ideals in school."

> This esprit de corps, school atmosphere, pride in [illegible] school and thought for its name and honor, is not to be gained in a day. It must become a matter of tradition and, once established, be handed down from one set of pupils to another. The influence of the older pupils upon the younger; of the graduates of the school upon their younger brothers and sisters, and their friends; of the parents and other citizens in the community — all this is of immense direct value in its effect upon the conduct of pupils. It counts for much if the parents advise their friends, "Get your boy into No. 100 if you can; it is a great school;" if the alumni think that it is a special honor to graduate from the school; and if the older pupils correct the young offenders in the name of the school. (p.)

Perry recognized many agencies involved in the development of the esprit de corps including the teacher, parents, older students, principal, outside speakers, and enthusiastic alumni. Effective use of assemblies, student exhibitions, discussion forums, celebrations of special days including birthdays, student organizations, school journals, and athletic programs all add to common spirit of the school according to Perry.

The literature continues to discuss the importance of school environment through the era of Dewy and the experimentation of the Eight Year Study. The 1950s saw a revived interest in the issue of school environment as Halpin and Croft (1963) called it — organizational climate of the school.

The work of Halpin and Croft provided a foundation for the research and development conducted jointly during the last three years by the University of Houston Central Campus College of Education and the Houston Independent School District in the context of a Teacher Corps Project. The Teacher Corps Project, through the United States Office of Education, developed regulations for school districts, universities, and

communities to work together in establishing improved school climate. Two of its primary outcomes for funding and implementation during a five-year period beginning in the Summer of 1978 are: 1) school climates that foster the learning of children of low income families and 2) an improved Educational Personnel Department System (EPDS) inservice programs for persons who serve or are preparing to serve in schools with children of low income families. The time frame for funding was unique in the history of Teacher Corps since it provided an opportunity for a longitudinal study of changes in school climate. The national program, however, allowed each local project to establish the procedures for measuring changes (or lack of change) in school climate as a result of some specific intervention.

The initial five-year project (reduced to four years due to Federal reductions) was divided into three different segments. The first year was designated as a planning year. The second and third years were designated as implementation years and the fourth and fifth years were set aside for dissemination and institutionalization of products, processes, or practices which proved to be successful during the first three years. For a review of the effects of the national Teacher Corps program see "The federal government as a change agent - fifteen years of the Teacher Corps," (Freiberg, 1981).

The Teacher Corps project included four urban inner city schools (two elementary schools, and a junior and senior high school). Total enrollment for the four schools was 5,000 students and 256 teachers. The elementary and junior high schools acted as a feeder system, sending most of their students to the high school. Project activities were coordinated through a Management Team which included the four principals, teacher representatives, local community representatives (including parents and local business people), central school district representatives, university faculty, and project staff. The management team met once a month at 7 a.m. to discuss the direction of the project with special attention to implementation of program activities in the school. The meetings had a consistently high degree of attendance and participation. An Evaluation Team formed as a subgroup of the Management Team. The Evaluation Team, which began in the planning year, was charged with the responsibility of measuring changes in school climate and evaluating the impact of intervention strategies in the four schools.

The Organizational Universe described by Jones (1981), provides an excellent framework for the discussion of the implementation of a school climate project in an urban junior high school. The junior high school is being selected as a case study

example from the four schools to illustrate the four steps identified in the climate segment of the Organizational Universe which include:

1. Monitor attitudes and morale as well as organizational functioning.
2. Focus on problem identification and problem solving in:
   a. Reporting relationships (role expectations, reorganization),
   b. Comomunication patterns (especially in meetings; try outlawing memos),
   c. Decision-making procedures (initiate more consultation with subordinates; experiment with consensus seeking in meetings),
   d. Norms (rules, pressures for group conformity),
   e. Accountability system (put some punch into the performance review; establish criteria for success),
   f. Reward system (initiate a multilevel task force to investigate salary administration; publish criteria for promotions and transfers).
3. Include the disaffected as well as those who are satisfied when diagnosing the causes of climate problems.
4. Push for visible results.

The organizational-climate can produce a drag on the productivity and goal attainment of the system. Managers need to be sensitive to the effects of their behavior on the climate, and they should examine the structure to find ways to ameliorate conditions. (pp. 160-161)

The organization of the project utilizing a management team approach to building school climate, allowed for open discussion of school climate issues and concerns. During the first year formal and informal needs assessments and site visits were initiated to establish a base-line for attitudes, morale and the general organizational functioning of the schools. It was evident that the four schools were at different levels in their need to improve school climate. The two elementary schools seemed to have a more positive climate than the junior or senior high schools. The results of a school climate questionnaire which was sent to teachers, parents and students during the first year substantiated this initial impression (See Table 2). In 1978, the junior high school had the fewest number of people satisfied with their conditions as reported on the school climate questionnaires. A new principal was replacing a retiring principal, and the school was faced with continued disruptions and confrontations among the student population. Many of these disruptivions were reported on the 5 o'clock news. This author upon returning from the first meeting in the schools fonund all four tires punctured. It was later jokes, that this was a very creative pretest for school climate.

Facilitating Change

There has been a great deal written about organizational change during the last thirty years. Jones summarizes the issues by stating:

> The functioning of the organizational structure creates an emotional "wash." The climate of the organization is the psychological atmosphere that results from and surrounds the operation of the structure; consequently, it is both a result of and a determinant of the behavior of individuals and groups within the structure. Gibb (1978) emphasizes the assessment of the organization's trust level as a beginning poinnt in managing change. Others emphasize different aspects of the climate, such as morale or stress. But although elaborate techniques have been developed to survey employee attitudes, the explanation of job satisfaction remains elusive (p. 160).

In working with any institution, it is important to understand both its history and culture. Schools are mini-societies which have norms, values, and cultural symbols. Change must come from those who will work each day in the schools. Change initially seems to threaten people's basic need for security. A facilitator of change must be sensitive to those needs and basic concerns.

Four general principles were utilized in the facilitative process. These included:

1) Those changes which are threatening to the self are more easily perceived and assimilated when external threats are at a minimum.

2) Change which requires a reorganization of the perception of oneself is threatening and tends to be resisted (Rogers, 1969).

3) Based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs - the security needs of an individual must be met before significant change can occur (Maslow, 1970).

4) People need different types of interaction related to tasks and relationships. Some people require high tasks and low relationship interactions while others may require low tasks and have relationships (Blanchard and Hersey, 1969).

Schools are a busy place. Teachers and administrators have enough demands placed on them without additional requirements from a Federal program. The Project staff viewed themselves as guests. That status moved to that of a family member as teachers, principals, and district administrators included the Teacher Corps staff in school and other social functions. School personnel who confided in project staff knew that comments would not be shared with others. The project focused on the teacher as an individual. In a large school and district it is easy to be lost in the crowd.

As an outside entity, even with a five-year mandate, we were limited in our direct impact on the schools. The problem during the planning year was to determine the vehicle(s) which could be used to facilitate change. Three vehicles for facilitating change were identified by the Management Team through needs assessment during the first year including: off-campus graduate courses, school retreats, and school/classroom management programs. The junior high school was the first to utilize all three

components. The case study description of this process parallels the four climate categories in the Organizational University.

The Graduate Course as a Vehicle of Change

The off-campus graduate course was an unexpected vehicle of change. In the Spring of 1979, six teachers from the junior high school enrolled in a graduate course offered off-campus (1 block from the school) by the University and Teacher Corps Project entitled: "Affective Education." This course, which began in the Spring of 1979 was continued through a special problems course in the Fall of 1979, the Spring and Fall of 1980. The class grew to include five principals (including the Junior High Principal).

The six teachers from the junior high who enrolled in the original Affective Education course initiated a series of school climate activities. They met with their recently appointed principal and received her support for establishing a series of "get togethers" before school on a voluntary basis. The principal suggested that the six teachers should facilitate the session. Three sessions were held between February and April of 1979 (See Figure 1). The first session was devoted to identifying problem areas in the school. Thirty-seven of sixty-five staff members attended that session at 7:20 a.m. The group decided to meet in one month to discuss possible solutions to the problems identified by the group (See Figure 2). Thirty-two staff members attended the problem-solving session in March. The final meeting on April 1, 1979, was devoted to the implementation of strategies identified by the teachers and supported by the principal. Fifty-four staff members attended the April 1, 1979, implementation strategy session. The six teachers planned to the last detail their meetings they focused on both problem identification and problem solving. They kept a seating/interaction chart of the meetings; they used group dynamics techniques to break old seating and communication patterns for the meetings; they included personal contacts with the current leadership of the faculty and emphasized common goals and objectives. Each of the six teachers and the other faculty assumed and completed specific roles and tasks. The first task the group completed was on April 23, 1979. The teachers restrooms received Kleenex, flowers, air fresheners, real soap, lotion, and gentile toilet paper. Since everyone used the restrooms, the teachers felt this would be an indication of an immediate and visible results and would improve teacher morale. A series of five school-wide activities was planned for the faculty and students. A teacher who helped develop the program wrote:

"Spirit Week" has been a booming success. All elements of the student body, faculty, staff, and administration have been involved in the activities.

Not mentioned in our project were many activities planned and carried out by other members of the staff. For example, one teacher planned int-a-homeroom baseball games; the participation of the entire school was excellent. The art teacher silkscreened hundreds of T-shirts for homerooms for the event. She also began a terrific art club for the students, taking them on many field trips and having them print the shirts. The Art Club plans to paint the school with beautiful murals next year and we hope to donate money from our dance toward that goal.

As one can see, it was the enthusiasm, creativity, and support of the entire faculty that helped to turn our school around this year.

Another member of the six-teacher team wrote:

In addition to the openness we've found, the compliments we've received, the many positive reactions to new ideas, and the overwhelming support from the entire faculty, staff, and administration at the school, many individual gains were made by members of our team. None of us can remember having worked so closely with others to accomplish a goal with no trace of competition or friction. In a spirit of nearly perfect cooperation, we have experienced support and encouragement from each other and developed close friendships within and outside of the group.

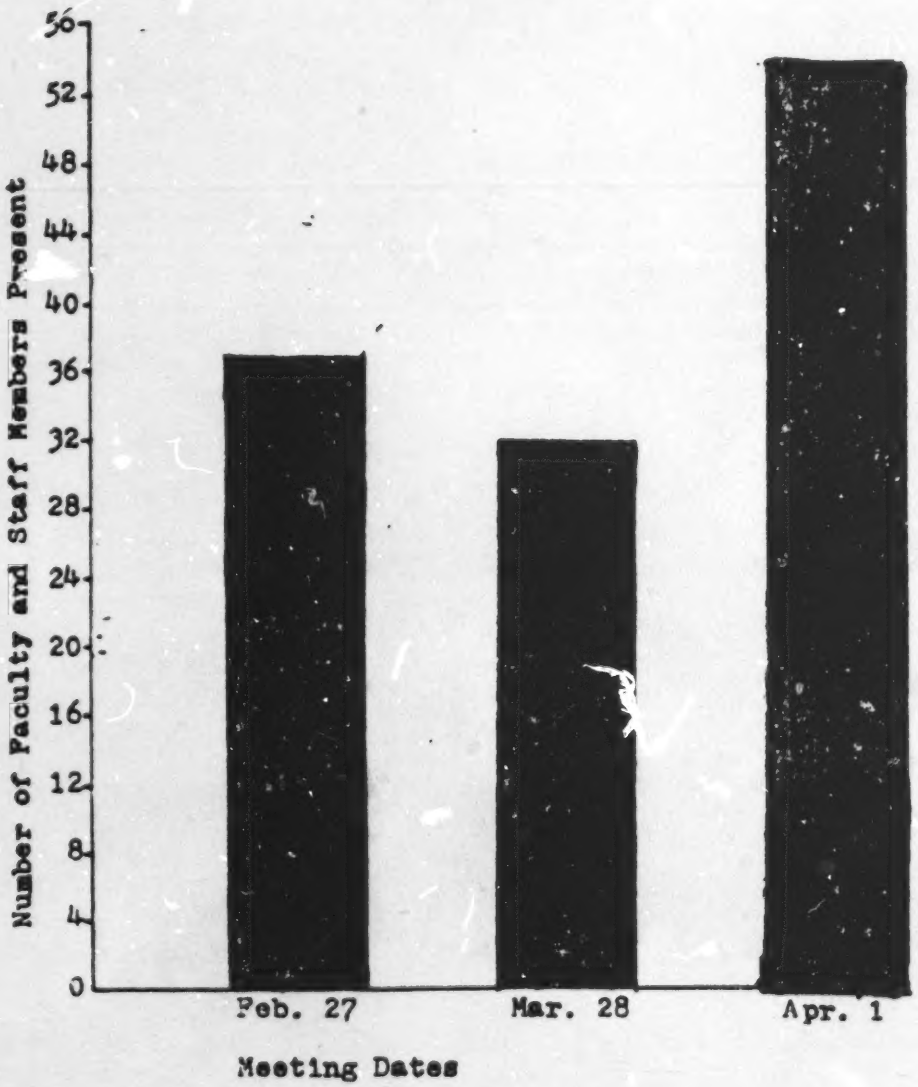
Thanks to our faculty and staff, team members, class members, and Dr. Freiberg, we have a feeling of success in accomplishing (or at least beginning to) our goals.

It is evident from the teachers' comments that the rewards they received were both intrinsic and extrinsic.

FIGURE 1

EVALUATION

TEACHER "GET-TOGETHERS" - JUNIOF HIGH



ATTENDANCE AT MEETINGS

The School Retreat as a Vehicle of Change

Although the Spirit Week seemed to increase teacher and student morale at the junior high, the issue of sustaining the level of interest and program activity remained a persistent concern. A number of teachers and the principal requested an opportunity to plan the beginning of school using two days of their summer vacation. They anticipated that a well-organized school opening would improve the school's climate and its instructional program. Both the teachers and Teacher Corps project contributed financially to the retreat. The retreat planning was conducted by the original six teachers who attended the graduate course, the principal and six teachers, who had received special training in human relations a few years before at Vail, Colorado, and were known to the staff as the Vail Team. The two groups merged to form the School Morale Improvement Team (SMIT).

The retreat, based on feedback from the 20 participants, was highly successful. The 1979 school year began with a new sense of direction. Unfortunately, the principal was in the hospital for surgery and missed seven weeks of school in September and October. Many teachers commented the retreat helped them work and stay together and become more consistent in their actions toward each other and the students.

The junior high school retreat held in the Summer of 1979 proved to be so successful that is August of 1980 all four schools including 56 teachers and the four principals participated in a two-day workshop which focused on a program of school and classroom management called Consistency Management (Freiberg & Buckley, 1981).

The Consistency Management Program as a Vehicle of Change

The Consistency Management program became another vehicle for change. It was based on the needs identified by the teachers and students for an effective classroom and school-wide management program. The program developers, with student collaboration, designed a system for school-wide rules, consequences, and rewards. The establishment of rules at the beginning of the school year is important because rules are the means by which teachers convey their expectations of appropriate behavior to students. A number of researchers have looked at effective teachers and concluded that rules are established from the first day of school (Buckley, 1977; Jackson, 1968; Sarason, 1971; Tikunoff, et al., 1975). The following information was presented to the participants:

Figure 2

JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL

PROBLEMS	SOLUTIONS
1. Low staff morale	a. fix up lounge; microwave oven
	b. softball team
	c. more plants in school
	d. paint school lockers, stairhalls, murals on walls
	e. treat people with professional courtesy; trust and respect them
	f. more positive reinforcement
	g. clean up the main office
	h. clean up student and adult restrooms
	i. provide more planning time, student aides or teacher aides
2. Communication between administration, teachers, staff, students	a. Faculty Advisory Council needs to meet more and report to others
	b. review of job descriptions and responsibilities; clarification of duties (teachers have too many responsibilities)
	c. advance notice of plans
	d. prepare teachers for fail-safe
	e. feedback from office when student is sent for disciplinary problem
	f. more cooperation among people
3. Arson, assault, extortion, vandalism	a. more supervision in halls to control traffic and tardies
	b. provide more security
	c. watch parking lot
	d. when students found in hall, take to one room and hold until cleared
	e. unlock gym doors and take care of tardy problem
	f. stiffer penalties, parent cooperation and involvement
	g. encourage positive behavior; find something constructive to use up excess energy
4. Students can't read and write, don't know personal information in case of accident, are not motivated.	a. vocational type of on-the-job training program is needed; take three classes and report to work
	b. more RWS teachers
	c. study hall
5. Low student morale	a. need more volunteer teacher-sponsored activities for students
	b. sell t-shirts
	c. music in cafeteria
	d. vail committee reinforcements
6. Candy machine in hall causes tardies, discipline problems, abusive language	a. get rid of machines
	b. put them in the cafeteria

No other aspect of teaching is so often given as a major concern by prospective, beginning and experienced teachers as that of classroom management (Dunkin & Biddle, 1974; Johnson & Bany, 1970; Weber, 1977). Classroom management is an important dimension of teaching because management activities lead to the establishment and maintenance of those conditions in which instruction can take place effectively and efficiently.

Today teachers from kindergarten through grade twelve are faced with serious discipline problems that hinder and frequently prevent student learning. The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) conducted a survey of 2,000 school administrators. The following problem areas among students were identified: apathy, lack of motivation, smoking, insubordination, use of marijuana and alcohol, tardiness, absenteeism, class cutting, vandalism, and theft of student property (Phi Delta Kappan, October, 1980).

What can teachers do about these problems? The solution lies with the collaborative efforts of teachers and administrators who systematically set limits for student behavior. Teachers and administrators must establish clear expectations for student behavior; communicate these expectations to students and parents; and enforce these expectations with school-wide consistency.

Consistency Management at the school-wide level is based on the research of Brophy and Evertson (1978) and the developments described by Freiberg (1979). The school is viewed as a social system and as such requires the support and cooperation of the entire staff from teachers to bus drivers to administrators. Consistency Management focuses the attention of the entire staff on the norms of the school and the expectation level of student behavior within these norms. There are numerous management programs for the classroom. Consistency management allows the teacher to establish and maintain classroom norms. However, once the student leaves the classroom and enters the halls, cafeteria, restrooms, gymnasium or other school facilities, the classroom norms may be forgotten. The consistency of each staff member reinforcing the agreed upon rules is combined with the student peer support to follow the rules. By explicitly stating the school rules, rewards, and consequences of breaking those rules, each member of the social system becomes a reinforcer for every other member.

On a school-wide basis, Consistency Management depends for success upon the establishment and maintenance of mutually agreed upon group norms. Johnson and Bany (1970) define norms as common values, ideas, and feelings which develop as a result of group interaction and of pressures to conform. Norms are the standards of reference by which acceptable or unacceptable behavior is evaluated. (See Note 1.)

The Consistency Management program which has been operational since August of 1980 has been a successful prevention and intervention model. The school district has requested that the Teacher Corps project expand the program to include additional schools.

The junior high school had a total of eleven significant positive changes from 1980-81 and 1981-82 when compared to the 1979-80 data. In the 1981-82 data collection there were a total of three significant positive changes and seven items which were in

a positive direction. During the 1979-82 period, the school had a dramatic improvement in Academic Test scores. No direct relationship could be made but the junior high school had one of the highest gains for any junior high school in the district.

Conclusion

The focus on the junior high school illustrates the need for both a facilitative aproach toward school climate and the need for a variety of opportunities to involve faculty and administration in the process. The climate component of the Organizational Universals an excellent model for describing the stages the faculty and administration experienced during their effects to improve school climate.

A post-script to this case study includes the addition of a school climate training component to the administrative internship program for new principals. The school climate component has been recognized by the Houston School Board for execellence.

TABLE 1. UH/HISD TEACHER CORPS SCHOOL CLIMATE QUESTIONNAIRES SUBSCALES BY RESPONDENT GROUP

SUBSCALE DESCRIPTOR	TEACHERS	PARENTS	STUDENTS
1. Leadership Qualities of Principal	1T		
2. Teacher-Colleague Relations	2T		
3. Parent-Teacher Relations	3T	3P	
4. Student-Teacher Interpersonal Relations	4T	4PS	4PS
5. Student-Teacher Instruction Related Interactions	5T	5PS	5PS
6. School Building and Faculties	6T	6PS	6PS
7. Student-Peer Relations			7S

TABLE 2: AVERAGE PERCEPTION OF VARIOUS ASPECTS OF SCHOOL CLIMATE AMONG TEACHERS, STUDENTS AND PARENTS AT THE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL IN 1979-80, 1980-81, AND 1981-82

Subscale (Respondent Group)	79-80	80-81	81-82
Teachers			
Leadership qualities of Principal	14.5	14.7	14.9
Teacher Colleague Relations	16.6	16.0	16.9
Parent-Teacher Relations	13.1	13.9	14.0
Student-Teacher Interpersonal Relations	17.6	17.8	19.2*
Student-Teacher Instruction Related Interaction	12.4	13.2	13.6*
School Buildings and Facilities	14.1	13.5	15.0
Students			
Student-Teacher Interpersonal Relations	15.2	16.7*	15.7
Student-Teacher Instruction-Related Interaction	16.1	17.7*	16.7
School Buildings and Facilities	14.9	16.4*	14.8
Parents			
Parent-Teacher Relations	18.1	19.5*	18.0
Student-Teacher Interpersonal Relations	17.3	18.9*	17.3
Student-Teacher-Instructional Related Interaction	18.0	19.0	17.6
School Buildings and Facilities	15.9	17.9*	16.2

In the Junior High School 63 teachers, 216 students, and 92 parents responded in 1979-80; 62 teachers, 159 students, and 53 parents responded in 1980-81; and 59 teachers, 157 students, and 70 parents responded in 1981-82

*Mean perception is significantly different (using a t-test $p < .05$) than the 1979-80 mean perception for the respective subscale and school.

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NOTES

Ref. Note 1 Excerpt from:

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FOOTNOTE

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